Dear Sir/Madam,

The IET’s response to the Call for Evidence from the APPG on Apprenticeships on ‘A Call For Evidence on Apprenticeships’

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) is Europe’s largest professional engineering and technology organisation with 168,000 members drawn from industry, academia and the public sector. The members represent a wide range of expertise, from technical experts to business leaders, encompassing a wealth of professional experience and knowledge. Our primary aims are:

• to provide a global knowledge network, promoting the exchange of ideas between business, academia, governments and professional bodies, and enhancing the positive role of science, engineering and technology
• to address challenges that face society in the future.

We would be happy to discuss our response in more detail and provide examples and evidence from our extensive networks of engineering employers and academic partners. Please feel free to contact us to arrange this.

Recommendations:

• Government should raise awareness Apprenticeship’s value through messaging and career’s advice in schools.
• Government should relax apprenticeship levy restrictions and support alternative, high-quality training options.
• Apprenticeship funding should be safeguarded by Government.
• Industry and academia should work together in partnership to develop flexible and innovative approaches, which Government should help facilitate.
• Government should raise awareness of T Levels as an equivalent to A Levels.
• Government should ensure apprentices have valuable and stimulating work to teach them key skills for work in the future.

3) What recommendations would you have for policy makers to support apprenticeships policy going forward?

The IET Skills Survey 2019 found that there is a shortfall of engineers in the UK of around 59,000 per annum.¹ The survey also uncovered that 46% of companies that did not have an engineering or technical apprentice in place were unlikely to create an apprenticeship. 71% of engineering firms that pay the Apprenticeship Levy have hired an apprentice. However, only 23% of companies looked to increase their number of apprentices. There remains a lack of awareness in society of the value of apprenticeships which is reflected within many parts of the Engineering Higher Education Sector and Industry. Government should raise awareness of the value of Apprenticeships through messaging, marketing and career’s advice in schools.

The freedom given to employers in England to design apprenticeships is laudable but has also resulted in complexity and inconsistency despite the best efforts of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to minimise these. This complexity is off putting for smaller employers and potential engineers.

The IET recommends that Government give employers greater flexibility on spending for skills development, relaxing apprenticeship levy restrictions and supporting alternative training options. 61% of our survey respondents wanted greater control over apprenticeship content to make them more relevant to their business.

Industry and academic should work as partners to develop a greater range and network of flexible, individually tailored and innovative approaches at different levels, which Government can help facilitate. This is a beneficial means of upskilling and reskilling technical staff to meet industry needs and keep abreast of emerging technology. This is particularly useful for SMEs where resourcing pressures, capabilities, size or location may preclude traditional training routes.

Apprenticeship funding should be protected by Government to avoid a reduction of engineering apprentices. Further education is critical to the skills pipeline and its funding in 2019/20 is set to fall by 13% in real terms since 2010. A reduction in funding will exacerbate the difficulties in supply for key engineering skills and could lead to an underinvestment in future skills. The post-COVID recovery will require more, not less, skilled workers. Apprentices are currently being furloughed due to COVID and are at risk of redundancy – however as the economy grows, we will need these skills to rebuild the economy. Government should help businesses continue to invest in apprentices to retain and to develop these skills for the future. Investment in skills is necessary now to build the technology of the future.

The Government should do more to raise awareness and take-up of T Levels as a valued, attractive qualification, equivalent to A Levels, that offers wide-ranging vocational and higher-level study opportunities. Engagement with students at an early age is an essential element, together with targeted approaches to parents, teachers and businesses. The Government should commit to ensuring the ongoing financial and staffing capability of the education sector to deliver T Levels effectively and keep pace with technological advances.

4) How can we ensure that apprenticeships play an important role in economic recovery?

With many redundancies expected in the post-COVID recovery, the economy may increasingly become more reliant on apprentices. Government should ensure that apprentices have valuable and stimulating work to teach them key skills for work in the future. Government must incentivise good apprenticeship schemes that is rewarding for both students and employers.

Apprenticeships are, and should be known as, credible alternatives to degree education with equal value. This will encourage more students into apprenticeships.

The IET are conveners and can help bring academia, training providers and industry partners together. We will work with all stakeholders on behalf of engineering.